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A word should be said for the make-up of this volume, which is a model of convenience, for both the general reader and the specialist. Instead of the annoying side or foot notes, the authorities (which read like Richie's "List of Lincolniana") are tabulated in an alphabetical index, and the valuable supplemental notes are likewise collected under the various chapter headings at the end of the book, which closes with a general index of most satisfying qualities. All these details enhance the practical value of such a work, and it is to be hoped that other historical essayists will profit by its notable example.

FREDERICK TREVOR HILL.

GEORGE MEREDITH.*

To see a new edition of George Meredith is like being young again, and how one envies those enthusiastic youngsters of literature who will, by means of this reissue of Messrs. Scribner, meet the great master for the first time. Who can ever forget his first reading of "Richard Feverel," and all that it meant to his heart and his head! For some of us who love literature the most romantic thing that ever happens to us is the reading of a great book for the first time. The first time we read the "Odyssey," the first time we read the "Morte d'Arthur," the first time we read "Romeo and Juliet," the first time we read Keats—and rapidly to descend to modern instances, the first time we read "Sartor Resartus," "Walden," "Leaves of Grass," and "Marius the Epicurean." There are, of course, many other books that live in our hearts like the memories of our first love—if the comparison be strong enough—those sacred formative books of the spirit, that come to us with such thrilling force and fragrance in the eager dawn of our lives; but, of all modern books, none, perhaps, meant so much to the young heart—of twenty years ago—as "Richard Feverel." It is, I think, long since a commonplace of critical acknowledgment that perhaps nowhere out of Shakespeare has the bloom and wonder of young love been so magically expressed as in those heart-breaking, beautiful chapters in which Lucy and Richard meet by the river. I speak of "Richard Feverel" in particular, because, as has usually happened with a great writer, Mr. Meredith seems to me to have concentrated all

* New Pocket Edition of the Works of George Meredith. Sixteen Vols. New York: Charles Scribners' Sons.

his gifts in this one book with masterly spontaneity: his romance, his philosophy, his comedy, his epigram, his humorous characterization, his tragedy, his irony, and, above all, that valiant spiritual faith in "the upper glories," which, in combination with his fearless acceptance of the realities of life, makes the final significance of his writing. Spiritual faith is to be judged by the amount of doubt it holds in solution. Much so-called faith is merely a refusal to see, to look at what we call the "hard facts of life"; but the value of Mr. Meredith is that he looks them all straight in the face, and yet believes in the radiant indestructibility of the spirit. No so-called "realist" was ever more scientific, more accurate in observation, more conscientious to record; and thus his optimism has a consoling masculine ring, which one misses in the sentimental cheerfulness of the professional optimist.

But I must not seem to imply that Mr. Meredith is a philosopher using the novel merely as a means of animated illustration. He is first of all a great creative artist, with an unusual combination of gifts; and he seems to me unique in his power of showing what a many-stringed instrument the novel can be. No novelist has ever done so many things at once with the novel as George Meredith, except Balzac. Many novelists have given us strong and accurate presentation of human drama and character, but one has felt that the minds that portrayed them were unequal to the significance of their material — good story-tellers, clever mimics, with no interpretative sense of that infinite something which fills the smallest actions of men with a wistful poetry. To be really a great novelist you must be a poet as well, and it is the poetic quality behind all Mr. Meredith's brilliance that gives his novels their peculiar dignity and impressiveness, and a quality of piquant intensity which, after reading him, makes other novelists seem curiously opaque and mundane.

This intense spiritual quality of his work has all the more authority in the case of a novelist who so evidently, as we say, knows his world, and is such a brilliant and accurate observer of social types and human character, gifted with so worldly a wit, and wielding such a lash of satire. Think of the range of power in the hands that could set Lucy and Richard by the river, and yet portray with such masterly comedy the sophisticated world of "The Egoist"; and, yet again, could write with swordlike strength the story of Italian liberty as in "Vittoria." As one goes over

Mr. Meredith's books, this remarkable many-sidedness of his power seems separately illustrated by each one. No two books are alike, but each reveals some quality not found in the others. But all, of course, are linked together by the common bond of that wonderful fantastic style which has always been, and probably always will be, a barrier between Mr. Meredith and the great majority of readers. Even the faithful have been known to grow exasperated occasionally over its bewildering vagaries—over such passages, for example, as the opening lines of "One of Our Conquerors"; and the first chapter of "Diana of the Crossways" is certainly one of the hardest nuts to crack in literature. To read "The Egoist" "at sight," so to speak, is as difficult as to read at sight a fugue of Brahms. Yet, admitted the frequent hardness of the nut, the question is—is it worth cracking? And to that question there can, of course, be only one answer. If a reader will not take the trouble to wrestle with a difficult master, the loss, obviously, is his own. And, indeed, seeing the subtle psychological nature of much of Mr. Meredith's material, it seems hard to conceive of any other style being adequate for his purpose—just, as in the case of Walter Pater, his much-misconceived style grows organically out of the subject-matter he strove to present.

Yet, as with Browning, Mr. Meredith's obscurity has been considerably exaggerated, and the wonderful beauty and power, the lyrical simplicity and swordlike swiftness of it at its best have been too little dwelt on. Particularly in the descriptions of nature, and in the descriptions of women—Mr. Meredith's wonderful women—does it rise to heights of rapture and loveliness unsurpassed, if indeed equalled, by any prose in the English language. And, as to the wit of the writing, there is hardly need to speak of it, for Mr. Meredith is easily the greatest epigrammatist of his time; and his epigrams, like all the rest of his writing, are illuminated and energized by that profound spiritual and poetic insight of which I have spoken.

It is natural to write first of Mr. Meredith as a novelist, but there are those for whom he is first of all a poet, those who, aside from "Richard Feverel," value most his "Modern Love," and his unique nature-poetry,—his "Songs and Lyrics of the Joy of Earth"—more filled with the very breath of nature, the smell of green leaves and the aromatic mould, than any other nature-poetry in English. It is strange to think that such poetry should

have waited so long for the comparatively meagre recognition that it is at last receiving—that “Modern Love” should have slept for over twenty years in a first edition, in spite of Mr. Swinburne’s impassioned praise. However, the poets are found of their own, and it is not the many readers, but the few, that count. In the hearts of “that acute and honorable minority,” Mr. Meredith is securely enthroned, and the man who wrote “Love in the Valley” can have no doubt of his position among English poets. There has been no space for illustrative quotation from his prose, but let me, by way of decorative tailpiece to my article, end with two of the loveliest verses ever written:

“Lovely are the curves of the white owl sweeping
 Wavy in the dusk lit by one large star;
 Lone in the fir-branch, his rattle-note unvaried,
 Brooding o’er the gloom, spins the brown eve-jar.
 Darker grows the valley, more and more forgetting:
 So were it with me if forgetting could be will’d.
 Tell the grassy hollow that holds the bubbling well-spring,
 Tell it to forget the source that keeps it fill’d.

“Happy, happy time, when the white star hovers
 Low over dim fields fresh with bloomy dew,
 Near the face of dawn, that draws athwart the darkness,
 Threading it with color, like yewberries the yew.
 Thicker crowd the shades as the grave East deepens
 Glowing, and with crimson a long cloud swells.
 Maiden still the moon is; and strange she is, and secret;
 Strange her eyes; her cheeks are cold as cold sea-shells.”

RICHARD LE GALLIENNE.

“THE AWAKENING OF HELENA RICHIE.”*

AMERICA has been fairly successful during the last two generations in the production of sectional novels; for some reason, too intricate to trace, we seem impotent as regards the universal novel, that form of which the Russia of to-day is past master.

Those whose memory reaches back twenty years or so to the publication of “John Ward, Preacher,” Mrs. Deland’s first notable success, will see growth in ease and grace of handling in “Helena Richie,” even some progress in liberality of thought and breadth of vision, but that which is lacking to make a seriously

* “The Awakening of Helena Richie.” By Margaret Deland. New York: Harper & Brothers.